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MAINSTREAMING CO-PRODUCTION INITIATIVES: How to enable long-term creation of public value

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ABSTRACT

Many co-production projects take place as short-term initiatives and there seems to be an empirical problem with mainstreaming the learning associated with such initiatives across units or departments. In this paper, we develop a 'co-production maturity model', which considers the range of short-term co-production activities and the organizational processes and procedures which are important when mainstreaming co-production. Mainstreaming co-production goes beyond simply ensuring that co-production is sustainable for an individual project. Instead, it is about applying the logic of learning throughout organizational structures, cultures, and processes and thus spreading learning beyond individual services. We argue that managers need to filter relevant information, create knowledge-sharing routines, and cope with conflicting pressures when mainstreaming co-production. This paper contributes to theories about the sustainability of co-production, bringing in organization and management theory to elaborate and discuss how mainstreaming of different types of co-production initiatives can be supported. We also raise questions for further empirical research and develop a research agenda for mainstreaming successful co-production initiatives, considering questions of sustainability, and organizational learning and development.

Keywords:

Co-production; public value; sustainability of co-production; organizational learning; organizational development

INTRODUCTION

Co-production, or the involvement of citizens and service users in the provision of services that they would normally passively receive as beneficiaries, has become one of the most important areas of current public management research (Bovaird et al., 2019; Brandsen, Steen, and Verschere 2018; Osborne 2018). One of the arguments for the popularity of co-production as a managerial trend is that it can be associated with the creation of public value (von Heimburg and Ness, 2021). In this regard, public value "*... is created when policy and management strategies look upward for political legitimacy, outward to the desires of the citizenry, and inward on issues of managerial feasibility and sustainability (...) and public value has become part of an overall managerial philosophy wherein public services are oriented toward local needs, authorized by service users and their communities, and evaluated in light of their results.*" (Nabatchi, 2018, p.60). There is hence a logic that co-production initiatives and projects lead to the creation of public value as a result of improved citizen empowerment and increased efficiency in the public sector (Brix et al., 2021; see also Moore, 1995; 2013). So far, studies have developed an

important evidence base as to the barriers and opportunities of involving service users in co-production, the challenges for professionals as well as organizational conditions for effective co-production (Van Eijk & Steen, 2014; Vanleene et al., 2017; Steen and Tuurnas 2018; Mortensen et al., 2021; Mortensen & Needham, 2022; Brix et al., 2021; McMullin, 2021, 2022b). However, many co-production projects take place as short-term initiatives, potentially limiting the long-term creation of public value. In many instances, these co-production pilots and projects do not always lead to the expected outcomes (e.g., Kleinhans, 2015; Jaspers, 2021) and when they do there seems to be an enduring question about how well the learning associated with co-production continues to generate public value (Anand and Brix, 2022). As the interest in co-production has grown, we see increasing attention to better understanding whether co-production can be made sustainable in the long-term.

Though we have some evidence about the sustainability of outcomes from co-production (see e.g. Jaspers and Steen, 2019), the processes of normalizing co-production pilots and projects into organizational practices have been given less attention. For co-production to lead to systems change and support the sustainability of welfare services, mainstreaming these ways of working is critical. We define mainstreaming as *the process of normalization or bringing into dominant organizational practices, or institutionalizing by spreading responsibility across units or departments*. Mainstreaming is usually considered in relation to gender mainstreaming, a practice of considering gender issues throughout public policy rather than treating something as a specialist issue/field (Daly, 2005; Solheim and Moss, 2019). In relation to co-production, we contend that mainstreaming, therefore, relates to making co-production a part of organizational structure, culture, and processes, beyond simply a focus on individual services/activities.

In this paper, we respond to following research questions: *What is important to consider when mainstreaming co-production into organizational practices, and how can such mainstreaming take place?*

Two sub-questions arise with regards to the mainstreaming of co-production:

- 1) What can be mainstreamed with regard to co-production?; and
- 2) Under which organizational conditions does mainstreaming of co-production work?

Building upon existing theories on the sustainability of co-production (Jaspers & Steen, 2019; Pestoff, 2014; Steen & Brandsen, 2020; McMullin, forthcoming), we develop a ‘co-production maturity model’ that considers the range of short-term co-production activities and the organizational processes and procedures needed to translate short-term co-production in one part of an organization into permanent ways of working across an organization (where it makes sense). This paper makes a novel contribution to theories about the sustainability of co-production, bringing in organization and management theory

to elaborate and discuss how mainstreaming of different types of short-term co-production initiatives can be supported, reflecting the construct of 'mainstreaming'. We also raise questions for further empirical research and develop a research agenda for mainstreaming successful co-production initiatives, considering questions of sustainability, diffusion of learning associated with well-functioning practices, and organizational development.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Since the introduction of collaborative approaches to governance and co-production, a shift has started to take place within many policy areas from 'standardized services' or 'service packages' towards 'specialized services' or perhaps even 'mass customized services' that have been co-produced with users and citizens (Pestoff, 2019; Jensen, & Thomassen, 2021). What is interesting – and difficult – in this shift is, that it has not been a clean-cut shift from New Public Management (NPM) to New Public Governance (NPG) and co-production, but a mix of both (Mortensen et al., 2020). Empirically, many different hybrid forms of managerial regimes have emerged in public sector organizations - especially in the Western world and particularly in Northern Europe (Alford and Friejser, 2018).

Co-production

Research and theorization on co-production has grown exponentially over the last 20 years, but the surge in popularity has simultaneously created increased complexity and confusion regarding what is and is not considered to be co-production. According to Bovaird (2007, p. 847), co-production relates to "*the provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers (in any sector) and service users or other members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions*". Empirical studies have focused on who participates in co-production and who benefits and the stage at which citizens take part (Brudney and England, 1983; Nabatchi et al., 2017), as well as the challenges and opportunities for professional and citizen co-producers (Tuurnas, 2015; Van Eijk, 2018). The evidence base on co-production stems primarily from the public administration/political science traditions and has thus focused primarily on professional-citizen interaction or collaboration. There has been considerably less influence of organizational science on the field, though some studies have begun to theorize about the organizational conditions in which co-production takes place (e.g. Brix et al., 2021; Thomassen and Jensen, 2021; McMullin, 2022b).

Though there has been considerable attention to the practices and processes of co-production (e.g. Mortensen 2020), most case studies focus on individual examples of good practices (see e.g. Hand 2018) or conversely (but less commonly), examples of negative experiences of co-production (see e.g. Williams et al., 2016; Brewer and Grabosky 2014). With both approaches, there has been less consideration of the organizational learning that takes place through co-production or how co-production can be made sustainable through the development of organizational practices across units

or departments (Anand and Brix, 2022). Mainstreaming is not about improving individual co-production initiatives but applying the logic of learning and co-production throughout organizational structures, cultures, and processes. This does not mean that co-production *must* form part of everything that an organization does, *per se*, but when co-production is mainstreamed, it means that citizen and/or users' inputs are taken into account when it is meaningful and used in a way that creates public value.

There is a scarce evidence base about organizations where co-production is effectively mainstreamed, but examples do exist, particularly within the third sector. For instance, research on parent co-operatives has shown that these types of organizations involve parents in organizational governance, in day-to-day decision-making, and in the delivery of childcare services alongside paid professionals (Pestoff, 2009; McMullin, 2022b). As Pestoff (2009, p. 197) argues, “*Third-sector providers facilitate citizen participation, while a glass ceiling for participation exists in municipal and for-profit providers.*” However, there is evidence that some municipalities are attempting to mainstream, or are in the process of mainstreaming co-production. For example, in the UK in 2010, the London Borough of Lambeth branded itself a ‘Co-operative Council’, and this notion of local councils institutionalizing collaborative working with communities has spread more broadly through the development of the Co-operative Councils’ Innovation Network. In Norway, Trondheim municipality is well advanced in realizing a co-production strategy, “*The Co-produced City*” (*Den Samskapte Byen*) for the entire municipality. This is taking place both from a city council policy perspective (top-down) as well as at the street level (bottom-up), and across organizational boundaries (for example, a university municipality, based on the idea of a university hospital). The ambition is that the citizens, therefore, co-produce the city with the municipality, organizations from different sectors, etc.¹

Evaluation and learning

Because co-production can be seen as a ‘complex, social phenomenon’ (Durose et al., 2015; Mortensen et al., 2020; Brix et al., 2020) we cannot base an approach to mainstreaming co-production on copying best practices or recipes for co-production. In other words: what works well to create outputs and outcomes as co-production methods or activities in one context might not necessarily work equally well in other contexts. It is more important to analyze and identify ‘what makes the activities work’ – that is to search for the generative mechanisms that triggered the outputs and outcomes (Brix et al., 2020).

During what has been referred to as the ‘Evidence Wave’ of public management reforms (Krogstrup, 2017; Krogstrup & Mortensen, 2021), public organizations most commonly applied the rationales of NPM by focusing on how best practices could be built and disseminated in order to increase efficiency, rather than searching to mainstream knowledge from co-production. This approach fails to recognize the importance of context in shaping how and why particular activities are successful (Kringelum &

¹ <https://sites.google.com/trondheim.kommune.no/samskaping>

Brix, 2020). Thus, the key premise in mainstreaming co-production is that contexts matter. This includes not only national or regional contexts, but sub-contexts such as different locations in the same city would require different activities to create the same outcomes for the same user groups in practice (Mortensen, 2020; McMullin, 2022b). Frontline managers and street-level co-producers thus need a toolkit of different methods and approaches to co-produce with citizens and users, and to understand how, when, and where to utilize this toolkit in practice to get the results desired (McMullin, forthcoming), e.g. creating public value (Nabatchi, 2012). There is a need for generative mechanisms (i.e. interpersonal competencies and relational capacities) to be triggered but the tools or approaches to do so will vary depending on the context, the people taking part in co-production, and the budget etc. For example, it is important in any co-production arrangement that professional co-producers collaborate with citizens and users in a way that fosters trust and positive associations, and not in a way that makes the users and citizens feel as if responsibilities are dumped on them and/or that their involvement is symbolic (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012, Van Eijk and Gasco, 2018; Steen and Tuurnas, 2018).

In the literature, we see different approaches to co-production ranging from systematic methods that bridge managerial levels such as the BIKVA methodology (Krogstrup and Brix, 2019a; 2019b), towards pragmatic constellations of methods such as the use of picture cards and dream-scenarios together with citizens (Jensen et al., 2020), and short-term projects such as peer mentorship projects (McMullin, 2022a). The maturity of the organization's experience with and strategic engagement to co-production as a 'way of working' will differ empirically, and therefore there will be different managerial tasks, degrees of involvement, etc. if we compare an organization that is just getting started with co-production to an organization that has implemented co-production as a way of working. This is further elaborated in the next section.

Organization theory

When acknowledging that co-production is a complex, social phenomenon, the organizational context creates conditions that support or prevent co-production from being mainstreamed into normal organizational practices (Kringelum and Brix, 2020). Mainstreaming co-production can therefore be understood as a process of organizational change and learning, whereby new practices must become part of the norms of operations (Jensen and Thomassen, 2021). Organizations are complex systems comprised both of formal subsystems – structure, operations, management, strategy, etc. – and informal sub-systems – or culture, leadership, workflow processes, norms, and politics (Mintzberg, 1980). Larger, older, public organizations are more likely to rely on structures that favour specialization and formalization, creating multiple obstacles to some types of organizational changes (Christensen et al., 2020; Senior and Swales, 2016). The values, assumptions, and artifacts that make up organizational culture can translate into different combinations of attitudes and approaches, such as the degree to which

employees are encouraged and supported to innovate and take risks, and whether the organization is more oriented to growth or stability (Choi and Chandler, 2015).

Mainstreaming co-production is a process that affects both organizational structures and culture. In regard to structure, organizations potentially need to rethink reporting relationships and division of responsibilities. Highly bureaucratic organizations with centralized power and a high degree of formalization are traditionally incompatible with co-production, whereby service users' expertise is valued alongside that of professionals'. By contrast, more modern, flatter organizational structures that allow for shared or distributed tasks and collaboration across teams or departments can adapt more easily to the introduction of co-production approaches.

Likewise, organizational culture is also impacted when co-production is repositioned from an add-on to a central component of organizational practices. Though organizational structure and culture are intertwined, culture relates to the more under the surface, symbolic or normative elements of organizations, including values, assumptions, and ways of working. Organizations often also have sub-cultures, whereby a particular team or group of employees may work in a different way from the broader organizational culture (Hofstede, 1998). Thus, in relation to co-production initiatives, we may see a team sub-culture that fosters collaboration between staff and service users, which may differ considerably from the wider organization (Mortensen and Needham, 2022). Because co-production is characterized as a complex, social phenomenon, then different local translations can lead to the same outcome, so a variety of organizational sub-cultures is not necessarily problematic (Kringelum and Brix, 2021)

Mainstreaming co-production necessitates an approach to organizational change and learning that takes account of the structure and culture of the organization in which the service is offered. Thus, while co-production might be positioned as a change in practices or processes i.e. shifting from traditional-led modes of service delivery to more collaborative modes, there is also a concurrent need for changes in organizational structure potentially changing hierarchies and reporting relationships, as well as culture. In relation to culture, spreading co-production across an organization necessitates that organizational mission and values are centered around the role of service users' expertise, and practices/activities for example, office layouts, communication patterns, etc., must shift to create conditions that enable co-production across the organization. These changes and adaptations require that the organization and its members approach the mainstreaming process with a learning mindset (Magno and Cassia, 2015).

In this process, we draw inspiration from organization theory, especially the approaches that focus on organizational development (OD) and organizational learning (OL). OD theorists and practitioners argue that change within organizations should not be approached on an issue-by-issue basis, but rather,

it is necessary to consider the organization as a complex system of interconnected parts. OL literature focuses on the change of the knowledge in the organization derived by experience and consists of the subprocesses of creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge (Argote, 2011). Where OL and OD can complement one another is that OL focuses on striking a balance between exploration and exploitation to make the organization more robust for the future (i.e. an innovation orientation), whereas OD primarily has an improvement orientation (Choi and Chandler, 2015; Anand and Brix, 2022). Long-term organizational success requires an organization to consider not just formal changes (i.e. in structures and processes), but also in facilitating an organizational culture that corroborates these. Mainstreaming co-production thus first requires the establishment and communication of an inspiring guiding vision for the organization that has public value legitimacy (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). This vision requires both top-down will (particularly political will) and bottom-up support. The process of organizational change and learning to bring co-production to the fore requires a process that focuses on developing both organizational structures and cultures through an iterative process that involves employees and other stakeholders in being active agents in creating organizational change (Choi and Chandler, 2015; Kallio and Lappalainen, 2015).

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

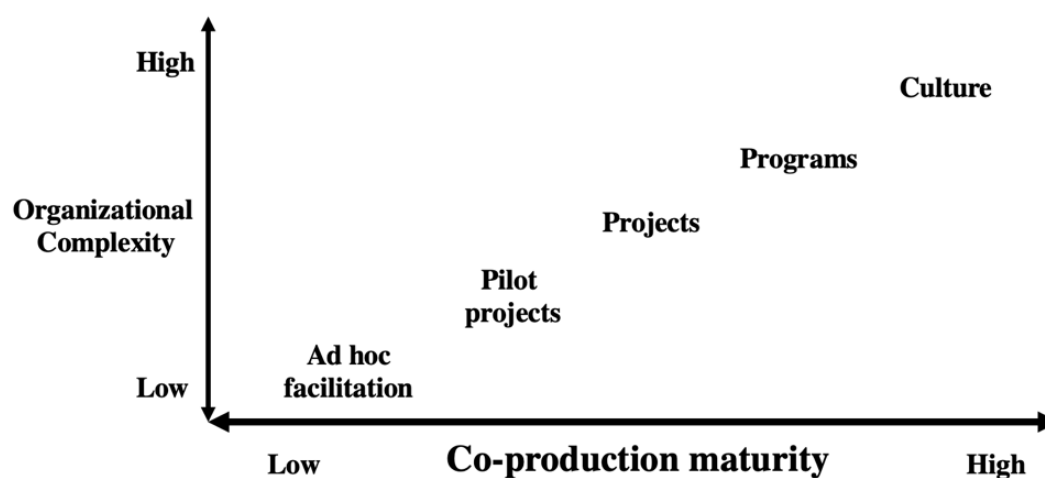
Municipalities and local governments across the Western world have started to include the notion of co-production in their strategy documents. Our ambition is to develop a way of thinking that can be used to diagnose where the organization is in its 'co-production maturity', e.g. if there are ad hoc initiatives taking place and/or concrete projects. In the following, we introduce the co-production maturity model and elaborate on what characterizes the different stages that organizations who co-produce can be at, and also give recommendations for how to proceed to the next step if needed.

Co-production maturity

In practice, there is a variety of co-production initiatives and organizations have developed different approaches to involving citizens and users in public services, ranging from simple interactions to more formal activities and large initiatives. Researchers have argued that for co-production to become sustainable it must rely on both individual, spontaneous acts as well as formally organized and institutionalized activities (Pestoff, 2014; Brix et al., 2020; Krogstrup and Mortensen 2017). We propose that such acts and activities are intertwined and will develop over time. Figure 1 illustrates these different activities on a ladder ranking from *ad hoc* facilitation to more established activities such as projects and programs. This does not mean that organizations will go through all the stages of co-production or have to go from one stage to another. Some organizations will begin moving towards co-production by initiating spontaneous day-to-day ad hoc activities and, over time, these processes will potentially 'mature' the organization for more formalized, structured, organized co-production activities. Other organizations may begin their co-production initiatives at this 'more mature' co-

production stage. The process of bringing co-production to the fore requires a commitment to co-production from actors at different levels of the organization as well as a focus on developing both organizational structures and cultures through iterative learning processes. Thus, such processes require a network of stakeholders and can have an intra- and/or inter-organizational dimension, where professionals at different organizations or units must coordinate to co-produce a shared service with citizens to create public value (Brix et al., 2020; von Heimburg and Ness, 2021), which increases ‘organizational complexity’ as co-production activities evolve and mature. In the following, the five (theoretical) stages of co-production are defined.

Figure 1: Stages of co-production



Source: Authors’ own development

Ad hoc facilitation covers spontaneous co-production acts done in day-to-day activities often within existing service delivery processes and organizational systems. Ad hoc facilitation can be done individually and collectively (Pestoff 2014). The individual level is when street-level co-producers use their discretion to adjust their actions and service delivery processes to the citizens’ wishes, capacities, and strengths (Steen and Tuurnas 2018; Korgstrup and Mortensen 2017). For some street-level co-producers, it may come naturally, and they might not even realize that they adjust their practice and acts to accommodate the non-professional users, while other street-level professionals will be more concerned with other demands and interests such as meeting the needs of the bureaucracy or KPIs (Jaspers and Steen 2019; Mortensen 2020; Bartels 2013). Collective ad hoc facilitation is when street-level co-producers adjust their practices on a collective level. This could, for example, be colleagues discussing a shared problem concerning their co-production approaches and collectively trying out different solutions to develop their co-production approaches based on these discussions. Such processes will often occur without a formal description or evaluation. However, for co-production to become sustainable, co-production activities cannot exclusively be based on the street-level co-

producers' willingness to engage in co-production and for example, determined based on whom of the users and citizens are liked or a creaming mechanism where street-level co-producers focus on the users which they consider most likely to succeed (Volckmar-Eeg and Vassenden 2022; Krogstrup and Mortensen 2017; Van Eijk and Gascó 2018). Therefore, ad hoc facilitation of co-production must be supported by more formalized processes and institutionalized activities.

Pilot projects are small-scale trials often carried out with limited resources, including time, money, and personnel. They are used to test a concept, idea, method, toolkit, or technology on a smaller scale before considering it for implementation on a larger scale. Pilot projects have the benefit of being low-cost, agile, and potentially provide insights into co-production barriers and drivers. Pilot projects can vary considerably in terms of size and duration. Small-scale pilots can relate to "micro-experiments" or "try-outs" whereby street-level professionals discuss new ways of incorporating co-production into their ways of working, which they themselves (perhaps in collaboration with researchers and managers) monitor and evaluate to determine whether to make these new practices permanent (Thøgersen, 2022; Mortensen, 2020). Pilot projects can also be where selected actors, agencies, or parts of an organization are chosen to test an idea or a process and provide feedback used to make adjustments before a wider release or starting a full-scale project (Jensen et al., 2019). This can potentially provide management with knowledge of contextual barriers and cultural elements, which can be hard to prevent from behind the desk.

Projects. As we consider organizations with an increasing level of complexity, there is a possibility to consider projects that entail a greater level of 'co-production maturity' than pilot projects. We differentiate 'projects' from 'pilot projects' in that pilots suggest approaches of experimentation, with the intention that successful pilots *may* be developed into longer-term projects (but not necessarily). By contrast, though the funding for projects may not be indefinite, projects are developed as fully fledged services or activities with an expectation that these will be beneficial and create public value. Such projects can be built on success or experiences from several pilot projects and will often have a single, focused endeavor. Projects can differ in size and time frame, but often a project will have a well-defined set of specific tasks for example aiming for specific co-production outcomes or trying out different toolkits or co-production approaches. Compared to pilot projects, a project might include more organizational units and require intra- or inter-organizational collaboration (Brix et al., 2021). Previous studies, such as McMullin (forthcoming) have identified the factors that enable projects to make their approaches to co-production more sustainable over time, suggesting that there needs to be a clear alignment between a project's structure (including design of co-production activities), resources, skills, and mutual commitment. Notably, this approach to sustainability focuses solely on delimited projects or services, and there is little attention to the broader organizational shifts in power structures, decision-making processes, and citizen involvement that might result as co-production is mainstreamed.

Programs: can consist of many projects and have many active units. While projects are focused on delivering a specific output or outcome, programs often focus on delivering a range of related outputs and outcomes that contribute to a larger strategic goal. The aim of programs is therefore also “...to be seamlessly interwoven and integrated within the on-going fabric of the organization to facilitate the absorption, adaptation and practical evolution of new capabilities” (Pellegrinelli 2011, p. 237). For example, professional training programs, or broader portfolios of services (e.g. social care, education). Programs can involve managing multiple projects and stakeholders, coordinating resources, and ensuring alignment with the overall strategic goals of the organization and will therefore typically also have a more formal governance structure than projects. Programs may have a program manager, steering committee, or other governance bodies to oversee the program’s progress. For example, in Norway, there is a movement that has been ongoing for some years, where some municipalities create strong ties with local universities in such way that they form ‘university municipalities’ with inspiration from the way that university hospitals work – the ‘Arena UniKom’ program.

Culture: As previously discussed, organizational structure and culture are intertwined, but culture relates to the more under the surface, symbolic or normative elements of organizations, including values, assumptions, and ways of working. The purpose of co-production projects, programs, etc. is for organizations to try out new practices, tools, and approaches as a way to operationalize the balancing act between exploration and exploitation (Choi and Chandler, 2015) and/or co-exploration and co-exploitation (Brix et al., 2021). Some of these approaches will be discarded, whereas others may be institutionalized (if judged successful) and thus become part of the organization’s culture (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). While there is no doubt that there are important benefits to co-production forming part of individual projects or programs within a public organization, the true value of co-production in creating systems change will only be fully realized once co-production is not ringfenced but rather becomes part of typical organizational functioning. When co-production actions are regularly repeated over time, put to use with limited difficulty or obstacles, it becomes part of the organization’s ‘taken for grantedness’. Thus, the last step for co-production maturity is for co-production to become part of the organization’s culture, which means that co-production will be supported by formal structure and processes, but also part of a common ‘way of working’. This level of co-production maturity thus relates to becoming an organization where co-production is truly mainstreamed, or, adapting Daly’s (2005) definition of gender mainstreaming to the co-production, is to institutionalize co-production/citizen participation by embedding co-production “*practices and norms in the structures, processes and environment of public policy*” (Daly, 2005, p. 435). By following the logic and definition by Nabatchi (2017) mentioned in the introduction, it is important that there are contexts that enable co-production, that there are appropriate processes to unfold the collaboration

between the professionals and the public, and finally that evaluations are able to discern if the outputs and outcomes matter to the public or not (Moore, 1995; Krogstrup and Mortensen, 2021).

Managers' roles in mainstreaming co-production

For an organization to mainstream co-production, it first needs a clear vision and strategy for using/implementing co-production across the organization (Krogstrup and Brix, 2019a). As other studies have argued in relation to the sustainability of co-production, there is a further need for a supportive structure and sufficient skills, resources, incentives, and mutual commitment to make co-production last beyond ad hoc or short-term approaches (Steen and Brandsen, 2020; McMullin, forthcoming). Mainstreaming co-production goes beyond simply ensuring that co-production is sustainable for an individual project or service: it is about spreading learning beyond individual services or units, as well as creating an organization whereby the involvement of citizens is the responsibility/duty of all levels and all departments.

Mainstreaming co-production is fundamentally a question of organizational learning and development, and culture change, moving an organization from a current state to a 'future state' whereby co-production is normalized. Much has been written about the difficulties that organizations face when trying to change their culture (e.g. Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015), but it is by no means impossible. As Schein (1990) argues, two of the primary ways that an organization's culture can be created is through an identification with leaders and through socialization of new staff members. Thus, leaders and managers have a crucial role to play in creating the incentives and conditions in which co-producing with citizens/service users becomes a normal way of working for staff across the organization (see also Mortensen et al., 2020).

When mainstreaming co-production there are at least three aspects that managers need to take into consideration: 1) filtering, 2) knowledge-sharing routines, and 3) coping with conflicting pressures. *Filtering* relates to making condensed knowledge available regarding new insights from co-production activities (i.e. ad hoc, pilot projects, projects) so that others across the organization can benefit from these lessons and decide what to adapt to their own context – rather than adopting precise practices (Kringelum and Brix, 2021). In other words, if a process has created good results in one context it is important that knowledge about 'why' the process worked is shared rather than explaining a step-by-step approach. We propose searching and sharing the generative mechanisms that were triggered in different contexts leading to desired outcomes, instead of 'what was done' or 'best practices' (Brix et al., 2020). For example, 'trust' and 'good relationships' are important mechanisms in co-production, and there are multiple ways to build trust and create good relationships in practice. This way, knowledge concerning the functioning and non-functioning co-production mechanisms is shared and can be utilized across organizational units (Chen, 2012; Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015).

Next, managers need to build *knowledge-sharing routines*, which include (re)defining internal structures that enable the sharing of knowledge resulting from the filtering process to where it is considered to be relevant. This requires a consideration of how and where knowledge can/should be shared internally, for example at physical meeting places and/or online/hybrid to enable physical proximity (Dyer and Singh, 1998). Managerial support and commitment from co-producers at all organizational levels are needed to build effective knowledge-sharing routines. Learning can also take place outside of the organization in order to inform co-production mainstreaming. For example, the Arena Unikom in Norway has an annual national conference that has been created to share knowledge about what works well (and less well) as a university municipality. Likewise, The Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network in the UK serves to share learning and case studies. While these types of forums can be useful to inspire employees and managers, such conferences happen once or twice a year, while mainstreaming is an ongoing process that necessitates constant filtering and knowledge-sharing within the organization.

Third, managers must *cope with conflicting pressures*, including political, budgetary, accountability, and legitimacy pressures. Managers need to identify (new) roles and responsibilities that emerge as they progress through the mainstreaming process. We know from the literature that new (co-production) roles and responsibilities can lead to dual pressures such as legitimate but conflicting requirements for both employees and managers (Jaspers and Steen 2019, 2021; Aschhoff and Vogel 2018; Mortensen et al., 2020; Mortensen 2020). To minimize coping behavior and avoid inappropriate coping there can be a need to collectively engage in dialogue to make sense of the dual pressure and try to mitigate them (Thomassen and Hammer, 2021; Mortensen 2022), or engage in dialogue that can help avoid counter production behavior and instead of having an acceptable amount of coping taking place.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In the introduction, we asked the following research question: *What is important to consider when mainstreaming co-production into organizational practices, and how can such mainstreaming take place?* Our conceptual approach to answering this question took its point of departure in discussing following sub-questions: 1) what can be mainstreamed with regards to co-production?, 2) under which organizational conditions does mainstreaming of co-production work?

First, when seeking to mainstream well-functioning activities related to co-production, it is important that managers acknowledge that co-production is a 'complex, social phenomenon' (Durose et al., 2015; Mortensen et al., 2020). Hence, managers responsible for mainstreaming must not automatically look for generating and disseminating *best practices* within their organization (Kringelum and Brix, 2021). Instead, it is important that managers find the generative mechanisms that were triggered by the activities to create the outputs and outcomes, and that they – e.g., together with the professional co-

producers in their organization – investigate how the triggering of these mechanisms can be translated into activities in their own, concrete context (Krogstrup, 2017; Thomassen and Jensen, 2021). The curiosity hence has to center around, 'why a given activity worked well' and not 'what was done'.

Second, for co-production to mature and become sustainable it must rely on individual, spontaneous acts, and formally organized and institutionalized activities. We present a ladder of 'co-production maturity', which illustrates different activities on a ladder ranking from ad hoc facilitation to more established activities. The ladder can be used to 'diagnose' what stages the organization is in e.g. if there are ad hoc initiatives taking place and/or concrete projects etc. used to deliver and create public value. We bring forward the argument that there are important benefits to co-production forming part of individual projects or programs, but that the true value of co-production in creating systems change will only be fully realized once co-production is not ringfenced but rather becomes part of typical organizational functioning, illustrated in the final stage of the ladder.

Finally, we argue that while the triple processes of *filtering, knowledge-sharing routines, and coping with conflicting pressures* are necessary for co-production to be mainstreamed, they are not sufficient without an organizational context that is conducive to large-scale organizational change. This means that co-production mainstreaming, as a process of organizational change, can be approached by employing organizational development and learning methodologies. Thus, holistic and sustainable change can only be achieved if it is driven by a vision – which is supported by upper-level managers and political decision-makers – that makes co-production a centerpiece for organizational purposes. This vision should trickle down throughout organizational decision-making, processes, and structures so that the knowledge-sharing routines and learning find their place so the sustainability of co-production can be achieved and more public value created with the same or less resources.

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